



December 2006 - Volume XLII, Issue II

Robert Altman Tribute

Marc Saint-Cyr on *Short Cuts*

With the passing of Robert Altman, American cinema has lost one of its most influential and creative forces. Though older than the movie brats of the 1970s (Martin Scorsese, Steven Spielberg, etc.), he helped usher in the New Hollywood era with such films as *M*A*S*H*, *McCabe and Mrs Miller* and *Nashville*.

I will always remember him for *Short Cuts*, his 1993 masterpiece about 22 characters whose lives intertwine over a few days in contemporary Los Angeles. Back in first year, I was discovering the wonderful Paul Thomas Anderson and his own sweeping ensemble film, *Magnolia* (which I still keep in my list of top 5). After learning of his adoration for Altman, I quickly sought out *Short Cuts*, which can easily be described as the fa-

ther film to Anderson's picture. While both films pretty much focus on the same subject matter (a web of loosely connected strangers colliding with each other in Los Angeles), they are radically different in both scope and style, and there's no denying which one was made by the older, more experienced master.

Short Cuts most reminded me of an ant colony kept behind transparent glass which allows you to look into the different, isolated portions of the colony at once - isolated, it seems, until you realize that they are all connected by a complex network of tunnels and passages which comprises the world in which they live. It's not hard to view *Short Cuts*' Los Angeles, as that ant colony, sustaining many inhabitants who, though they mostly don't realize it, are quite closely connected in the community they live in.

Spotting these connections is part of what makes the film so fun to watch - how exactly is Tim Robbins' asshole cop connected to Jack Lemmon's estranged father? Or Robert Downey Jr.'s goofball makeup artist to Matthew Modine's troubled husband? Or Tom Waits' drunkard limo driver to Alex Trebek? Altman allows us to figure it all out in a very loose and distanced cinematic style. Throughout the film, the camera drops in on one of the storylines, lingers for a few moments, and then cuts away to another - whether it's dimly related to or completely different from the previous one. Altman's trademark overlapping dialogue is frequently used, adding a element of confusion and reality to certain scenes. When he wants us to pay special attention to a particular scene, he zooms in on the actors, allowing their performance to seize the viewer. And rather than heighten-

ing the film's emotion with a dramatic, operatic score (like Jon Brion did for *Magnolia*), he keeps everything cool with a nice, mellow jazz soundtrack. The overall result is quite rare: instead of choosing for the audience which characters to love, hate or sympathize with, the film allows the viewer to make his own judgments based on what they see rather than what is shown to them.

Brimming with humor, drama, absurdity, wit, pessimism and sadness, *Short Cuts* remains one of the most insightful films on human interaction and emotion that I've ever seen. Crafted and realized with great care and expertise, it is truly the work of a master filmmaker. Rest in peace, Robert Altman, for your artistic legacy will shine on. • *Further reading for this article is available at www.innisherald.com.*

Chris Heron on *3 Women*

The death of a director always invites reflection on his/her oeuvre, but with Robert Altman's works it's difficult to cite a moment where connections were not being drawn. Provoked both by the necessity for this type of viewing within a number of his films themselves, and simply to understand his consistently free movement from genre to compounded genre. It is this latter approach that best characterizes Altman's lasting interest for me: His belligerent approach to conventions, even while navigating within their major studio waters. To this end, *3 Women* will always stand as his most poignant statement.

The film's genesis is an overly worn anecdote that surfaces every time the film is considered in print, but it's vital to this dichotomy of the outsider artist and convention that is so prominent for both this film and Altman's career as a whole. Briefly speaking, the name of the film, Shelley Duvall and Sissy Spacek's involvement and its desert locale first occurred to Altman in a dream. He then improvised the concept as a short story when pitching it over the phone to Fox studios. The consideration of something so steeped in a disjointed dream logic, and the subsequent use of free improvisation (Altman often suitably referring to the process as «vamping») shown here underscore the artistry while immediately setting the project apart from convention.

Fittingly, the film opens amidst washing superimpositions of water over paintings, indicating the fluid willingness to be shaped by context, and thus chance, in the process of creating art before revealing the artist herself: The agent of this ideology. Though her screen time is rare, and her dialogue rarer still, Willie Hart (Janice Rule) maintains as significant presence throughout the film as foreshadowed by this introduction, with the importance of artistic expression outside convention as the film's central allegory.

Meanwhile, Millie Lammoreaux (Duvall) is positioned on the opposite end of the spectrum, representing the passive submission to convention, and thus its bed-fellow, commercialism. Her identity is borrowed almost entirely from women's magazines, subsequently employing all manners of pre-packaging. She cannot alter the clothing she purchases, and her «famous» meals are entirely derived from cans (including the potato chips) for the greatest possible saving of time, to name two examples where artistry is possible only to be stifled. However, Millie's persistent desire to be accepted is exactly what alienates her from the very people she hopes to impress. This natural desire to care and be cared for is obscured by her attempt to reconcile it with the standards she tries to follow, and is only released by the exposure to the dominantly conventional Edgar - Willie's husband, and a former stunt man in the least genuine of places: Hollywood - and the naturally unconventional Pinky (Spacek).

Pinky, having recently moved to

California, immediately attaches herself to Millie when the two meet as employees at a geriatric spa, where the subtle exposure of this caring attitude is amplified in its juxtaposition with the cold glances of the other women. During their introduction, Millie symbolically baptizes Pinky in her training process, beginning the indoctrination of these beliefs of convention - Duvall's ad-libbed monologues frequently approaching sermons themselves. This admiration taken in conjunction with their shared physical slightness and home state begins Pinky's snowball of identity theft rolling. More interestingly, though, this mirrors the same awkward approach to the identity construction that Millie undertakes when she borrows from the magazines she worships.

Though the identity theft is a culmination of admiration, it is not a comfortable one for either parties involved. It reflects Millie's shortcomings, and is grasped as a compromised solution by Pinky's coma-coming psyche. Initially, Pinky is never postulated as similar to Millie, despite obvious admiration. Rather, her ability to sew, her messiness when opening one of Millie's pre-packaged meal items and her forthright complimenting of Willie's paintings separate her from Millie and the fetters of this conventionality. Moreover, Pinky's coma and the resulting supplanting of Millie in Millie's own dreams of popularity is what draws out the reluctant caring in Millie that problematizes her efforts heretofore.

If Willie and Millie are opposite sides of the same spectrum (alluded to even

in their names), it is Pinky that occupies a central position, just as her name does between red and white. In the barren landscape, where the individual is capable of constructing themselves from the ground up, Millie places herself in a pseudo-hip, mainstream apartment, whereas Willie is able to live in veritable isolation at the crowd-desiring, Hollywood-emulating Dodge City, and leaves her trace in both locations through her paintings. She does not seek a habitat that reflects what is seen in magazines, but is able to maintain and convey her identity in any surrounding, like a skilled improvisational musician.

The climax of the film occurs when the titular three women are driven together by the strong male figure of Edgar. His extramarital relationship with Millie provokes Pinky's coma, his extramarital relationship with Pinky disenfranchises Millie from the mass acceptance she previously desired, and, finally, his abandonment of the pregnant Willie during labour pushes both Millie and Pinky to her bedside. In this scene of heightened emotion, Pinky's shock at the gravity of the situation renders her unable to fetch a doctor - standing still while Millie incapable attempts to deliver the baby. When Millie reprimands her with a slap to the face, Willie's blood transitions between the three, signifying the rebirth that occurs here, even as the fetus is delivered stillborn.

(continued on p. 4)

The Innis Herald

www.innisherad.com

Innis College • Room 210 • 2 Sussex Ave. • Toronto, Ontario • M5S 1J5
innis.herald@utoronto.ca • 416-978-4748

Editor-in-chief: Jennifer Charles / *Associate Editors:* Christine Creighton & Marc Saint-Cyr / *Internal Officer:* Suzanna Fung / *Film Editor:* Daniel D'Alimonte / *Editor-at-large:* Stephen Hutchison / *Photo Editor:* Tim Richards / *Webmaster:* Michelle Nguyen / *Layout:* Carl Heron & Jean Charles / *Contributors:* Michael Beeler / Justin Haley / Chris Heron / Stephen Hutchison / James Kang / Chander Levack / Tim Richards / Marc Saint-Cyr / Vaquas Shaikh / Tim Walker

The Précis

- * Identity theft is not a comfortable proposition (p. 1 & 4).
- * Ant colonies always have one goofball makeup artist (p. 1).
- * Self-congratulation and University organizations (p. 2).
- * Democracy's relationship with juvenile claptrap (p. 2).
- * In our modern world, it's the « perfectly normal » who are the real victims (p. 3).
- * A testament to the corrupting powers of « *Sweet Valley High* » (p. 4).
- * No, this review is *not* a rip-off of « *Black Veil* » (p. 5).

- * Repetitive listening to pop music sheds light on life (p. 6).
- * Repetitive listening to pop music does not shed light on life (p. 7).
- * The obsessive appeal of sexual intercourse and carbohydrates (p. 8).
- * *The Battle of Algiers* does not contain a single frame of documentary or newsreel footage (p. 8).
- * The further encouragement of Martin Sheen's authoritative associations (p. 8).

Inside Innis

by Tim Walker

Innis College's student groups have been extremely busy as the fall semester continues to drag on towards the finals we all inevitably face in early December. The Innis Residence Council (IRC), Innis College Student Society (ICSS) and Innis College Council (ICC) have all been holding regular meetings to ensure that the average Innisian can get as much out of their year here at U of T. Here's a summary of what these fantastic councils have been up to so far.

The IRC, under the leadership of President Trisha Roy, started the year off with a bang. The Residence Extravaganza, featuring a Graffiti Party (!) got the year off to a great start. Ikea trips, Iron Chef, House Olympics and an assortment of other activities has kept the residence buzzing well into November. Look out for a slew of great House Olympics, Residence-wide events and student-study-aid info sessions bound to be coming your way.

The ICSS, lead this year by Melissa Kim, has also been incredibly busy. After a hugely successful Frosh Week (run by yours truly, and his « better half », the incomparable Leela Steinberg), the ICSS has been running events to get you out of your rooms and into the college. Frosh Week was capped off with the first pub night of the year, a Toga Party. Since then, the ICSS has run a Clubs Day, Study Break, Halloween Pub Night, and is gearing up for a trip to the Nutcracker, and the social event of the year, Formal. Two new initiatives started up this year include Innis Supports and the Innis Commuters Club – great ways to get involved if you're looking to procrastinate.

The ICC has also got the ball rolling this year with our first meeting held in early October. The ICC is the decision making body at Innis College, and remains the only such body with a parity structure (essentially, there are equal votes for students and faculty on this board) at the University of Toronto. One of the main focuses of this year's ICC is the Student Experience Fund from the Provost. The Provost is accepting bids for projects specifically targeted at improving the student experience at U of T. The Student Space Committee is formulating a proposal and is always looking for tips and/or suggestions that could improve your experience at Innis College. The ICC and its subcommittees will continue to meet, and more will be available on their progress as the year goes on.

With all that already happening, how can we possibly top that? Get ready for Winterfest, a campus-wide, Frosh-Week-In-Winter series of events that is bound to get you out of bed and onto campus with what promises to be a memorable week of hijinks and tomfoolery. Formal is just around the corner, and before we know it, we'll be into the Spring Elections to select next year's councils. For more information on any of the aforementioned councils, don't hesitate to contact me at t.walker@utoronto.ca. And that is what's happening Inside Innis. *

Altruistic Antonio:

I revile global capitalism and all its shallowness, material fetishes and egocentric individualism. All people care about these days is themselves— all that matters is profit.

I refuse to be just another cog in the world's money machine. I work not for myself but for others. I am an idealist. I understand how the world should be.

If we cared more about each other, rather than the « *bottom line* », then we would live with peace, happiness and equality – things that money cannot buy. Absolute altruism – total selflessness and compassion – that's the highest moral virtue.

I could have been the CEO of the wealthiest multinational corporations. I could have been a plastic surgeon making millions off my nation's vanity.

Instead, I head the world's largest urban food bank, giving 50 hours of unpaid labour each week to my cause. Instead, I oversee a medical clinic in Uganda servicing 5 000 people.

Oh, and those damn philanthropists... They just want acclaim and recognition. They go parading around as the heroes of humanity because the interest on their mutual funds gave them a bit of extra money for a nifty public relations campaign involving the trademark charity of the year.

Self-Interested Smith:

I reject that secretly self-indulging, self-gratifying group that claims moral superiority under the façade of altruism, and who pursues self-interest through the accolades given for supposed self-sacrifice.

I refuse to deny my innate desire for happiness and achievement. Wealth is neutral— how we wield it is what matters. I am a pragmatist. I understand how the world works.

I sustain Adam Smith's invisible hand. Moral intentions don't matter, the end results do. Real consequences should be our only moral concern.

As CEO of Wealth Unlimited™, I led a nationwide public relations campaign. As my country's top plastic surgeon, I raked in \$5 million last year.

I made the campaign focus on community outreach. It fully funded three urban food banks. I gave half my income to Antonio's medical clinic, which now can service 15 000 people.

Those sanctimonious volunteers... Do they really think that giving one's time is somehow inherently superior to giving one's money? They parade around as altruists, denying that their actions are just as self-interested as everyone else's. In exchange for my donations, I get acknowledgement, praise and « *feel-goodness* ». They get all that, plus résumé padding. Altruism— it's just the latest trendy brand of self-interest. *



Democracy Doesn't Work

by Stephen Hutchison

Every so often I wonder whether our public officials aren't playing a practical joke on us, acting out some sort of farcical parody of democracy. During the lead-up to the recent midterm elections, the Democratic Party, so often outwitted by their Republican rivals, spent tens of millions of dollars on focus groups to devise the best slogan that money could buy. Their result: « *Together we can move forward* ». Those five rather uninspiring words and the expensive process at which they were arrived seem to symbolize much of what is wrong with modern democracy. Politics has become mediocritizing, fascism: a mental flesh-eating disease, stripping its victims of all semblances of greatness, uniqueness, and independence. Genuinely talented individuals enter politics and before long polls, focus groups, advertisers, image consultants, advisers, and speech writers coat them with a thick glaze of mediocrity. Sixty years ago, Winston Churchill, a man with no formal education, worked alone over a single evening to compose his « *Blood, Sweat and Toil* » speech, one of the most famous and eloquent in history. Now, Ivy League-educated Democratic Party officials spend several months and millions of dollars to write « *together we can move forward* ». Welcome to the new democracy.

Those who think the system can be fixed by implementing proportional representation or some other institutional change are short-sighted and wrong. The problem isn't the electoral system but rather our consumer culture. We are all consumers, and electoral candidates are products like any other. The act of selling a candidate is no different than selling deodorant or hairspray. Market research is conducted, a product is offered that conforms to what research suggests the consumer wants, and advertising is used to manipulate the public into selecting the product. In many cases, the candidate is advised to make no public appearances whatsoever: why risk proving your advertising wrong? With the candidate effaced, elections become, in U of T professor Allan Greer's words, the ritualized jousting of public relations firms. Market research conducted by rival candidates, however, evidently yields similar results. Witness the Democratic Party's strategy in the recent midterm elections: unable to defeat the Republicans' social-conservative demagogues, the Democrats simply fielded candidates who were just as anti-gay and anti-choice as their opponents. Scruples are a burdensome handicap in this game. To illustrate: four years ago a friend of mine, a charming young politician in the making, was invited to have dinner with John Manley,

then Canada's Deputy Prime Minister. After the meal, my friend asked Manley's chief of staff what was the key to political success. « *There are two*, the chief of staff replied: *have lots of money, and no principles* ».

Absent in consumerist democracy is any sense of public discourse or societal vision. During the nineteenth-century, British Prime Minister William Gladstone spoke of the moral duties of the audience in his speeches. Now, political "stump speeches" – so called, Jon Stewart wryly observes, because they are to oratory what stumps are to trees – simply lay out promises which no one, including the candidates themselves, take seriously. Did anyone really think that Paul Martin would actually « *fix health care for a generation* »?

No one ventures new ideas or offers courageous leadership when the focus is placed upon pedestrian conformity to already accepted expectations. Parties are separated only by personal animosity, with rival echo chambers spewing vacuous catch-phrases at each other. The transcripts of parliamentary debates, meanwhile, are filled with page after page of juvenile claptrap. In the nineteenth century no politician would have, as Stephen Harper has done, stood in Parliament and accused his opponents of favouring child pornography, supporting Saddam Hussein, desiring to aid criminals, and disdaining veterans and seniors. Politicians once spent weeks writing and memorizing speeches to impress and persuade their colleagues. Now, politicians bumble their way through thirty-second sound bites, reading stutteringly from a page written by someone else.

Is it any wonder that the top political offices of Canada and the United States are occupied by grotesque mediocrities? This can't be what democracy is supposed to be. This system doesn't deserve our support. *

Just Say No to Drugs

by Vaquas Shaikh

The number of drugs being pumped out by pharmaceutical industries has been increasing over the last couple of decades. Yet there has not been a corresponding increase in health problems. So what are the drug companies up to?

I used to think that the pharmaceutical industry was a tightly regulated, ethical and noble enterprise aimed to rid the world of sickness. Among other sources, the film *Big Bucks, Big Pharma: Marketing Disease and Pushing Drugs* shattered this view and opened my eyes to their capitalist nature.

As a business, pharmaceutical companies seek to maximize profits. Advertising is a powerful means to do so. We have all seen the ads: formerly sick people take a miracle drug and are instantly transformed into healthy ones – jumping, laughing and dancing. And at the end of the ad, a person rapidly shouts out a list of possible side effects. Such advertisements are made under the guise of « *educating the public* ». But how is that possible when all the information they present is biased? They never tell you in quantitative terms how effective a drug is and how many people it has worked for.

Another heinous, yet lucrative, strategy in the drug companies' advertising arsenal is the invention of conditions that urgently require their miracle drug. From a business perspective, this strategy is ingenious; you create a market and then thrive in it. And so, drug companies have invented such ailments as « *Restless Leg Syndrome* » and « *Anti-Social Disorder* » by classifying perfectly harmless and normal conditions as diseased. They have even given acronyms to these conditions for credibility. Consequently, a perfectly normal person sits down in front of the TV one day, watches such an ad and realizes that he has a disease that needs immediate treatment. So he rushes to a doctor and asks her to prescribe the drug from the

advertisement.

In addition to targeting the consumer, drug companies also advertise to health professionals. They offer free drug samples, gifts, lunches, golf games, cruises, etc. to doctors and medical students. This bribing is done with the hope that doctors would prescribe their brand of drug rather than another. Furthermore, drug companies actively monitor doctor's prescribing activities so they know who to bribe more or less.

Despite their capitalist nature and the consequences that follow, pharmaceutical companies do benefit us. Thus, not all prescription drugs are « bad ». The point of this article was to raise awareness of the profit-driven nature of pharmaceutical companies. I hope that you are more skeptical the next time you see one of these drug-pushing advertisements. On a final note, it is a well known fact among the medical community that in 75% or more cases, the human body recovers on its own, without any drug intervention. Thus, although drug therapy is beneficial for many conditions, it is not the solution for every ailment. *

Interpretations of the sample of Willie Hutch's « *Tell Me Why Has Our Love Turned Cold* » in Three 6 Mafia's drug anthem « *Stay Fly* » by individuals who believe in Satanic Hypnotizing.

* He's our God, he's our King, Lucifer.

* Lucifer, you're my King, you're my father.

* You are God, you are King, & Lucifer.

* You're my God, you are King, you're my God, Lucifer.

* Lucifer, he is King, he is God.

* Lucifer, you my King, you my God.

* Lucifer, he's our King, 'til I die.

* Lucifer, he's my King, and I love him.



In It to Win It

Chandler Levack Recalls The Little Miss Brantford Beauty Pageant

When I was 9 years old, living in Brantford, Ontario (Canada's capital of teen pregnancy and birthplace of the telephone), I wasn't very cool. I was the kind of kid who tried to star in the school play and run for class president, but ended up spending a lot of time reading alone at recess instead. I would spout \$40 words in class, sing loudly in the church choir, but forget to hand in math assignments. I didn't fit in. And because of this, I was always searching for ways to stand out.

About halfway through Grade Four, signs were posted in the Brantford Mall advertising the first annual «Little Miss Brantford Beauty Pageant». The grand prize would be a \$50 gift certificate to the Brantford Mall (which held a Biway and Bulk Foods at the time) and the honorary title of being Little Miss Brantford for a whole year, complete with a hypoallergenic sash and crown. Searching for Sultana raisins in Bulk Foods with my mother (life's rough when you're 9 years old), I saw the sign and was floored. My mother grudgingly agreed to let me participate in the pageant, visions of Jon Benet Ramsey dancing in her head.

Filling out the application form (my «greatest dream») at the time was to win an Academy Award in the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion— I recited my impromptu speech and my mother would critique it, reminding me to thank my agent, I thought about my glimmering future as a pageant queen. First I would slaughter the competition at the Brantford contest, and move on to win the title of Miss Brant Country. On I would go, netting the title of Miss GTA, Miss Ontario, to finally, blowing kisses to each of my fifteen boyfriends in my acceptance speech, winning Miss Canada. The world would be my oyster. It didn't matter that my current

best friend was my 6-year-old brother, too stymied by my control of the remote to ever complain that I was making him try on cardboard tiaras.

On pageant day, my mother fluffed my thick brown hair out to Joan Crawford-like proportions and gave me a Dynasty-era green velvet dress to wear, purchased at the mall's Biway. I admired myself in the mirror and reviewed my lyric sheet of «Colors of the Wind» for the twentieth time. I was in it to win. But backstage, my stomach grew tense. Standing next to me were the girls I was afraid to speak to in gym class. Tall, blonde, thin, with strictly «colours in the border»-type personalities, these were the girls I had to turn tops for when we played double dutch at recess. That is, when I wasn't reading copies of «Sweet Valley High», exiled to my place next to the swing set.

The judges were also pieces of work. One woman I remember had nails so long they began to coil over in curls, painted bright coral pink. A man (who I would later find out was, in fact, the manager of Bulk Barn) looked like he had gotten lost on the way to the Mark's Work Warehouse next door. The audience, mostly pageant mothers and my own, holding my brother (wearing a baseball hat this time) on her lap, looked both worried and excited for their insecure pretenders, who were sweating onstage under the hot stage lights, set up in the Brantford Mall food court. Onlookers ate corndogs and observed, patting their newly pregnant bellies in amazement.

I watched a bevy of border-colourers recite their practiced lines about who their «favorite person» was (Jesus, obviously) and what their favorite thing was to do (rhythmic gymnastics). My palms began to feel gooey as I watched the judge with the coral talons awkwardly enter scores on pink «Little Miss» judging stationery. And then it was my turn. I felt as sweltering as the corn dogs I could see rotating at the food stand next to me. For the first time in my life, I wished I was eating

a corndog.

Coral talons took the mike. «Contestant Number 5», she announced, in a clasped voice. «What is your favorite day of the year?» This was easy. My mother and I had practiced this one while I was supposed to be studying for a test on roman numerals. «My favorite day of the year», I said, pausing for dramatic effect, is Remembrance Day. Remembrance Day is my favorite day of the year because it is the day that brave soldiers died in the war. They gave so much for our country so that we could have the kind of autonomous (cha-ching!) lifestyle that we do. And—, I gave another pause, tension growing like kudzu, it's also my birthday. The room erupted in applause. Just wait until I perform Pocahontas, I thought to myself. Those border-colourers had better watch their backs.

Time passed, rhythmic gymnastics were performed and eventually it was down to the final three: myself, and two of my most feared competitors, Sara and Kara. In Grade 4, there was a table of girls that sat together, trading in pencil crayons and stuffed animals for secrets about training bras and foreplay. The thing that made these girls the most powerful girls in all of Grade Four (they were basically «The View» of Cedarland Public School) was the fact that all their first names ended in an «A». Sara, Tara, Kara and Tina (an exception) excluded me, an «R» from their table, forcing me to sit with all the other alphabetically undesirable. While these were not the same girls, the fact that they had what I didn't already made me concerned.

Sara, Kara and myself formed a little semicircle in the middle of the stage, trying to dodge the jabs of the coral taloned judge as she explained the events that had occurred today in the Brantford Mall food court. «Now we have three contestants left, she announced dramatically. But only one can become Little Miss Brantford.» She held the envelope in her hands as I made contact with my mother who gave me a little conspiratorial wink. If I won, I told myself, I would be

a role model for girls who read every recess. Maybe there was room in this world for young girls who couldn't jump rope properly, who preferred the world of Sweet Valley High novels bought at garage sales and the companionship of a 6-year-old boy to reality. Maybe I really was Little Miss Brantford. Talons opened the first pink envelope. «And the second runner up is—Contestant Number Five, Little Miss Chandler Levack!» Pity applause was given out to Little Miss Congeniality as I received my second runner up prize, a \$10 gift certificate to Bulk Barn (my Mom looked appalled) and a cheap plastic picture frame featuring a smiling girl who looked nothing like the savior I wanted to become. Sara and Kara moved closer to center stage as I moved father back. I can't remember who won.

On the drive home, my mother tried to console me while I slunk low in my seat, \$10 worth of Smarties melting in the sun of the Ford Windstar dashboard. «It's because you weren't ten, my mother explained. Both those girls were ten, I asked their mothers.» I shook my head, big pin curls practically smacking me in the face. «Anyways, it's not the end of the world. You wouldn't want to be Little Miss Brantford. Look what happened to that poor Jon Benet. Do you want to be murdered and found in our basement?», my mother added for good measure. I looked over at my brother, who stared at me from the back seat. «Am I ugly?» I asked him. He shrugged. I slunk back down in my seat and shoved another handful of Smarties in my mouth. I could only wait for next year. Already my mind was reeling as I pictured myself in the sash, standing victorious over all the Kara's in the playground. I would be a year older, taller, prettier, a real Little Miss. *

3 Women continued

The epilogue signifies this new family dynamic, with three descending generations living isolated at Dodge City. A coke truck introduces this portion of the film, but this symbol of the mainstream and its delivery man are incapable of registering as important to an aloof Pinky, and are undercut when the man is unable to understand how Edgar, who is so proficient with firearms, could have a life-ending accident with one. The audience immediately understands that the prominent male

figure—emphasized by his phallus in Willie's art—has been eternally subverted. The murder of Edgar was as much an expression of pure interest as all art, and the pile of tires that are suggested to be hiding his body stand as a sculpture commemorating this occasion.

Altman, too, was an advocate of this discourse with the mainstream. While this film is not impenetrable, it most certainly does not reveal itself upon first viewing, and never sheds all of its ambiguities. The musical refrain that surfaces throughout the film's

strange moments is as curious as Altman's persistent zoom, both of which stubbornly draw attention to the film itself through their over-saturation, while revealing their unnatural properties: They are elements that typically appeal and cater to the audience, but here call attention to manipulation and voyeurism that engenders to the audience a similar standard to borrow that so negatively affects Millie and Pinky—should we be passive to their presence. Instead, we must identify our real desires and give credence to their expression, rather than impose shackles

of expectation on ourselves. To compromise personal interests for a popular reception, or its financial rewards is fundamentally flawed. Art must champion art and the artist in its very being. Over the course of his always intriguing, unpredictable career, this is a worthy message that Altman most expertly conveyed. * Further reading for this article is available at www.ijmsherald.com.



A Band for All Seasons

Chris Heron Investigates the Wolf Eyes Discography

The association of music with the four seasons has been a longstanding preoccupation of mine, but, admittedly, not one that ever compelled me to explore its underlying rationale. I'm not particularly sure there is an underlying rationale; the number of variables involved in a listening experience makes this a slippery topic to firmly handle. Does music have intrinsic elements that make different styles applicable to different seasons? Or do we as listeners simply associate particular works with when they were most frequently or significantly experienced?

I intend to continually revisit this question, applying the topical framework to the evaluation of the *œuvres* of some of my favourite artists. For a first pass I intend to challenge the idea as much as possible by considering the genre of noise, one that induces so many claims against its status as music that whether it can instill feelings associated with particular seasons should act as a quick litmus test for the validity of this research.

In brief, Wolf Eyes are a noise trio from Ann Arbor, Michigan, who are known by their preference for iography, being extremely prolific by way of self-publishing (AA/American Tapes/Hanson/Gods of Tundra) and their place at the forefront of the metal/hardcore school of noise.

Spring

Live!!! Black Vomit (2005 on Purple Stuff Cassette / 2006 on Victo CD)

It came as no surprise that legendary free-jazz saxophonist Anthony Braxton became a Wolf Eyes fan upon seeing them live for the first time: a typical Wolf Eyes performance is rooted in songs, but is largely improvisational (referred to as « jams » with a contagious enthusiasm). Saxophone has been an integral part of their music since Olson joined the group, but with Braxton handling the horn duties and the nature of inter-genre collaboration, a new vocabulary is successfully amended to the language of Wolf Eyes as these two experts of dynamics engage one another in a performance at 2005's Victoriaville Festival.

The beginning of the performance is particularly bright and flighty for Wolf Eyes, though the scraping, plodding and gonging indicates the noise to come. This calls to mind the break in the cold that spring heralds, though by way of storms. Similar to the progression of the season, the piece becomes increasingly fervent and torrential, momentarily calming before ascending to a fever pitch. I've often heard types of distortion be compared to rain, and not only does the noise at this climax

resemble a downpour, but its production exhibits a wash effect. Ultimately it's the return to the chipping solo sax of Braxton, acting as a framework, that perfectly embodies the duality of the season's weather—the most persistent image this piece provokes being that of a moderately bright, green day, punctuated by a hard rain, though it eventually relents, leaving an emollient haze and the return of the birds' songs.

What this document also includes that is unfortunately absent from many of their live releases (often self-titulated before self-released) is the levity that makes attending a Wolf Eyes concert so much fun: the stage banter, especially from jocose John Olson. Already over-quoted—but rightfully so—is the introduction to the last piece: « *Anthony, what do you want to hear man: Leper War or Black Vomit?* ». When Braxton responds with « *Black Vomit* », Olson dares him: « *Let's see what you've got* ». Appropriately, Braxton is playing with more fire here, as he had with the preceding « *Stabbed in the Face* ». Following a rather restrained performance, this is eagerly welcomed, and it is for this reason that I associate this work with the spring: while the opening playing by Braxton and its relationship to the watery noise most evocatively spring, it's the following two works ushering in a heat, calling attention to its close proximity to summer, that really confirm the description.

Summer

Dread (2001 on Hanson/American Tapes LP / 2002 on Bulb CD)

The beginning of *Dread* throws me off each time I hear it: there are only some quiet electronics, and they are almost techno in their presentation. Of course, it makes sense when, after a very brief moment, the head-banging noise stomps into the mix, dominating the rest of « *Burn Your House Down* » and bringing things into recognizable Wolf Eyes country. However, the electronics return for « *Desert of Glue, Wretched Hog* », now looped for head-bopping with appropriately skittering, sharp drums of dub (the name of the album's pun is intentional).¹ It's at this point I remember that this album must be intended to throw you off. We're talking DFA-approaching jams here—don't worry about the first track, it seems Daft Punk are playing at this house. The clear, disengaged vocals call to mind post-punk, and before long there are seriously washing synths. There are very few wretched elements here, especially by Wolf Eyes standards. « *Half Animal/Half Insane* » and « *Let the Smoke Rise* » confirm this direction with borderline rapping(!). The typically propulsive approach of the band is rendered explicitly dance-oriented here, with the former track burning down the house as it becomes more and more raucous. A lot of noise could be argued to be particularly hot, but this is a sweaty release in the way only poppy dance can bring, and for that reason stands apart from all other Wolf Eyes re-

leases. After the first track, it's consistent, as well, reminding that unlike fall and spring, summer is predominantly one note—and it's a fun, sunny one at that.

Fall

Fuck the Old Miami (2003 on Chondritic Sound 3" CD-R / 2005 on Important LP)

Fuck the Old Miami just may be my favourite Wolf Eyes release, and apparently holds similarly high esteem in the eyes of the Eyes themselves, who consider it one of their best live performances.² Recorded on May 3rd, 2003 in Detroit, this piece is by no means gentle, but by Wolf Eyes standards there is a definite restraint present—one that reveals itself in a casual, gradual manner. The group's typically propulsive sound, initially in full force, is quickly tempered by contrastingly shimmering counterpoints. Acting in accordance with this, the beat slowly moves to a crawl before withdrawing completely, leaving only Olson's sax—at times in their catalogue a veritable death knell from its distortion—contemplative in its airy minimalism. The noise soon returns, but the middle section and the eventual conclusion are all the more stark in their pensive clarity: the last minute's clattering and reverberated sax being as beautiful a moment as Wolf Eyes has yet delivered.

Like fall, much of its appeal comes from its situation between extremes, affording and encouraging meditation—present here not only in the sparse interplay and droning sax, but the band's clearest vocals yet administered, bordering on folk with their Jandekian delivery. The relaxed pace and subdued arrangement are not only characteristics that I frequently associate with music in fall; they are two musical elements often present in folk music, which makes the conspicuous vocals, and thereby intelligible lyrics, all the more apropos. As with seasonal transition, this is a work that is accessible due to its interweaving of dynamics within a (relatively) subtle presentation—you can still identify the extremes, but there's an opportunity to catch your breath.

Winter

Human Animal (2006 on Sub Pop CD & LP)

With winter and summer it's easier to relate music to seasons, simply because there is an infrastructure of language in place here: hot and cold are often used to describe music. If there's one thing most people will notice about « *A Million Years* » and its industrial clanking, regardless of experience writing about music, is that it's cold. When the noise eventually comes, as it always does, it breaks like howling wind. « *Rationed Rot* » was incorrectly attributed to the clearly identified « *Black Vomit* » on *Black Vomit*, but here in a studio setting it more closely resembles that first piece on that release. The sax maintains a prominent role, but the electronics and echoed noises are harsher and cast a

shadow over the entire piece. Furthermore, this musical connection with *Black Vomit* lends credence to the comparison, just as winter and spring are so closely linked. This casting of the sax in a slightly different manner also occurs with « *Leper War* », where the sax is obscured by static, calling to mind another musical element frequently associated with a climactic element: Snow.

While these are the most immediately applicable portions of this album, they inform the dense noise of « *Rusted Monge* » and « *Human Animal* », malleable in their intensity to the themes of the more nuanced pieces. This may be where the noise genre becomes most interesting in this type of evaluation: like ambient electronic music, not only is there room for complete subjective projection, but influence from other pieces on the very same release. Yet there's always the possibility of intent, a dubious point of assessment. The final track, « *The Driller* », recalls « *Rusted Monge* » and « *Human Animal* » more than « *Leper War* », « *Rationed Rot* », « *A Million Years* », or the transitional « *Lake of Roaches* ». However, at the very end, the most emphatic moment on the album, the sax returns with the squalling delivery of « *Leper War* », confirming many of the images I've had heretofore, and signaling the cohesion of the release by uniting its two focuses—resulting in one of their most satisfying whole studio statements. This is especially convenient as « *The Driller* » is also the most accessible, well-crafted song on the album, and possibly in the entire Wolf Eyes catalogue.

The difficulty I found was more in the distinction between musical properties in relation to the transitive seasons. Spring may err on the side of summer when fall does for winter, but both engender an amalgamation of the extremes. I've ascribed meditation to fall, influenced by the popular application of this cycle to that of the span of life, but the birth qualities of spring can sometimes be similar in their subtlety and restraint. Noise may cater to the impressions of the listener, but I found satisfactorily clear associations in the Wolf Eyes œuvre, just as easily as with any other genre or artist more traditionally featured in this type of investigation. The prolific nature of the group potentially makes this easier than most, but I think that's an important mirroring of the quality of noise music itself: it has a rhyme and reason despite its complete open-endedness, which allows its malleable elements to not only be pondered, but encourages a complete discographic exploration. •

Further reading and citations for this article are available at www.minniserald.com.



A Never-Ending Fantasy

As Endured by Chris Heron

The loose rationale I had to justify listening to Mariah Carey's « Fantasy » on repeat for four straight hours was an exploration of the effects of repetition in pop music and the possibility of more deeply personal epiphanies. However, the latter aspect belies the former as flimsy reasoning: to be honest, I simply wondered if I could handle the challenge, like lining up all night for boxing day sales with no intention of purchasing anything. What I recognized is my own propensity for that universal indulgence alluded to in the title, providing a lone connection between myself and Ms. Carey that, in the face of scandalous drag races and barely-there bandanna bras, can clearly only exist between two sane, well-adjusted individuals. She took her path, and I've taken mine.

I'll admit that the experience did not last the full four hours, unfortunately, due to time constraints. Nearing on two hours, things had to be curtailed, though I still fancy the experience of only listening to one song for an entire day. Yet, by some stroke of luck, even moderate repetition of this song yielded plentiful insight into the song itself, if not myself. When listened to in this manner, the expert relationships between form, content and the listening experience are fully revealed, indicating a complex representation of an aspect of life that extends beyond the song itself to include the music video and even a notable remix.

The beginning of the song is immediately memorable for its disconnection, overflowing with conflict and drama that become all the more noticeable in their juxtaposition with the rest of the song, and even the video, where the creepiest clown this side of *It* gestures the viewer towards his land of gratuitous visual effects and a winsome Mariah Carey. A breathlessly high gasp follows, heralding in the « Genius of Love » and multiple Mariah's shoo-doo-dooing, the contrast becoming one of the only reliably enjoyable parts of the song in this continuous listening environment. Repeated listens reveal that this is where the fantasy takes hold, following whatever discontent we can glean from Mariah's vocal gymnastics. The chorus's opening lyric, « *But it's just a sweet, sweet fantasy baby* », perfectly encapsulates the gleeful feeling as the melody hazily hovers amidst a gratuitous- almost pornographic- level of overdubs. It disappears and reappears in the song just as its delivery rises and falls, conveying the uncanny feeling of being trapped on a never-ending roller coaster- the special kind on which Mariah can inconceivably be the centre of the song in the accompanying video. At first this



is enjoyable and appealing, but taken as a whole, the three and a half minutes of escape are so sugary sweet- so unrelenting in their meandering joyfulness- that your patience is completely tried by the end; feeling as sick as you would on just such a roller coaster experience.

Yet, this desirable fantasy that we embark on for such a prolonged period does not resolve the initial conflict. Instead, it constantly draws attention to its artificiality and the disappointment that this brings. Things end- if it can even be constituted as an end in its lack of development- with one more « *shoo-doo-doo-do-do-do* » reverberating the lack of progress: the echo conveying the utter hollowness of this solution.

But this is an exercise in excess, so the song must go on. Once the comparatively sane intro begins again, the launch of the fantasy is just as enjoyable as the first time. One could easily make an analogy to a drug, and the persistent need to reinstate the high, but it's just as depressing in the form of a fantasy, which shares the same principles of retreating from reality. The feeling is uncannily reproduced in the listening experience: when early into the fantasy Mariah hectically belts out « *I'm so into you, darling if you only knew* », a glimmer of real strife and emotion presents itself and thus creates an appeal that is never lost.

Another noticeable break is the lifting of the Tom-Tom Club song's chorus, mercifully taking the tone down a few

notches. However, this is also where the song reaches its zenith of delusion, as Mariah loses the self-awareness her depression previously afforded her. Like the first taste of the fantasy, this delusion is also one of the most enjoyable parts of the song, showing how ugly that which we desire can be. Moreover, this delusion is as close as things get to a resolution- her actual attainment of the dream gentleman- but is immediately undercut by the chorus presenting itself again (and again). Occurring at the end of the song, when the repetition is at its most grating, this return to the melody loses its appeal- the high clearly coming down. The fantasy needs to be initiated again if we are to further ream the little happiness it can supply.

The dynamic of the high is central to the song, and especially noticeable in its absence within the Puff Daddy remix, featuring Ol' Dirty Bastard. In the original Mariah has no boyfriend, only herself- literally, as she's accompanied by the aforementioned multi-tracked Mariah. This is the reason for the comparatively teeth-aching sweetness of the fantasy. However, in the remix, two male presences exist: The raucous Big Baby Jesus and a breathy P. Diddy. The many Mariah's are gone, the tone and tempo are far more relaxed and the purple haze is traded for a much appreciated clarity: there is a stability in the song as well as the lyrics. ODB draws Mariah to the depths of their relationship when assuring the two

go back « *like babies with pacifiers* ». Similarly, in a remarkably effective move, where the Tom Tom chorus was the height of delusion before, here it acts as a testament to where this newfound equilibrium derives, replacing the « *But it's just a sweet, sweet fantasy* » chorus of the original. This shows how diametrically opposed these two efforts are in the Mariah psyche, as now the source of desire is present. Yes, Ol' Dirt Dog is not only « *no liar* », but, apparently, also the culprit that kept Mariah's « *fantasy hot like fire* ». Fittingly, the remix concludes with overdubbed Mariah's now joined by ODB, finally united in their heaven.

The same propulsion does not occur in the remix as it does at the start of the original, but proportionally it does not experience the same lows at the end. Both essays are integral to the process, though, formally reenacting the gamut of relationship whoos and woes that Mariah so eloquently expounds upon in the lyrics. These are universal feelings that Mariah was once capable of vocalizing, before Cameo took the role of ODB (in the comparable « *Loverboy* ») and Carey embarked on the most gratuitous- definitely pornographic at this point- portion of her career. Like Mariah, we all share a weakness for fantasies. Yet, can any expectation be completely realized? It is merely setting one's self up for disappointment- the fierce stomach ache that you get at the end of each listening of « *Fantasy* », or from the critical and commercial failure of the movie loosely based on your life. I must interject here, friends, speaking from my experience. You cannot solve these problems merely by starting the fantasy over again. It's simply a fleeting joy that may not diminish over time, but only leaves you worse in its absence. One mustn't become this dependent on false realities. One must plow past one's difficulties, and set less lofty, shorter term goals. Low expectations yield higher outcomes. We should be like Diddy. What was he going to do when he got out of jail? He was going to do a remix, and have some fun. • *Further reading for this article is available at www.rollingstone.com*



A Never-Ending Fantasy

As Endured by Chandler Levack

What happens when you're trapped in a tiny overcheated room with lavender walls, listening to nothing but Mariah Carey's « Fantasy » on repeat for two hours? As it turns out, you end up kind of hating Mariah Carey. I once interviewed Neil Strauss, a feature writer for *Rolling Stone* and a professional pick-up artist, who confessed that he consciously passed up the opportunity to interview a post-hospitalized Carey for the periodical. Strauss explained that if forced to listen to Mariah's entire oeuvre for research purposes, he feared it might « make him a worse person ».

I don't know if I have the desire to rob banks or kill small children after listening to Carey warble on about the fantastical aspects of unrequited love 55 times in a row, but I definitely have the urge to hurt somebody—most likely myself. Mariah's voice stretches from obscene cat-like yelping highs to breathy lows like chewing gum. Every time I hear the mystical carnival instruments in the track's opening (to simulate the fantasy, I guess), my head starts to pound. I'm like Pavlov's dog, but instead of drooling, I'm contemplating how to escape a room with only one exit. The worst part is that my compatriot and I are not even listening to the good version of « Fantasy », featuring the rap stylings of Ol' Dirty Bastard

with the better percussion. (Fun fact: it's also the first singer-hip hop collaboration ever.) We are listening to pedestrian « Fantasy », when Mariah still had all her natural hair.

Amazingly enough, no matter how many times I listen to the track (and I've listened to it enough to fill my life-long quota), I still can't get over how perfect it sounds when Mariah says, « *I'm so into you* » in the first verse. In fact, the first verse of « Fantasy » remains untarnished no matter how many times it repeats. There's something about the way she punctuates « *into you* » in her street-smart multiethnic voice that sounds wonderful. I could listen to « *I'm so into you* » marooned on a deserted island Lost-style and be perfectly content. It's the cherry on top of now, way too many chocolate sundaes. This may be the beauty of pop music—there's always something redemptive in the fabrication.

However, the « Fantasy » stops being redeemable after the first verse and becomes a series of painstaking repetitions. The chorus, « *But it's just a sweet, sweet fantasy baby* », with the Novocain-inducing guitar swirls and synthesized keyboard stings are barely listenable at 10, 15 plays. At 33, I'm dreaming up ways to get back at my compatriot—perhaps by lethal injection. And at 55, it hits me: I'm sitting in a tiny purple room listening to Mariah Carey's « Fantasy ». I am trying to learn about art, but instead am learning nothing. This chorus repeats on and

on throughout the 4:05 minute piece, shifting in tone, style and theme but still remains wholly similar. The lyrics, « *But it's just a sweet, sweet fantasy baby/ When I close my eyes/ You come and take me* », are ostensibly about Mariah pining for a dream husband who doesn't exist (probably because she was too busy getting pummeled by her producer boyfriend Tommy Mottola). In one verse she claims that she was « *in heaven with my boyfriend/ my laughing boyfriend/ there is no beginning and there is no end* », throwing a problematic curveball into the proverbial mix. Is Mariah's beau dead? Is this « Fantasy » actually a reminiscence of someone long gone? If so, it makes even less sense in the O.D.B rap remix where this line wisely is repeated for the track's duration and the sugary chorus left for the conclusion. The rap remix allows Mariah to wax rhapsodically about her long-lost love while O.D.B. states the obvious: « *Girls let me see you shake your rump, Fellas get it from the back and pump it. Let's do it, do it, do the bump* ». Sheer poetry.

If « Fantasy » consciously represents everything that popular R&B aspires to, it is seemingly successful yet utterly problematic. You can't escape the sugary melody once it clamps on to your mind. The lyrics, while appearing kind of meaningful (in that, we've all had relationships that exist only in our minds), are actually quite empty. And Mariah's voice is the perfect caterwauling cry for pop music—she reaches out and grabs

the listener while articulating nothing. Chrissie Hynde is someone who makes the audience feel. Mariah instead goes through the motions and scales of her « Fantasy », but leaves us high and dry. She lets the elaborate instruments overwhelm her voice and any emotion it might create. Carey is the perfect mythical figure for popular music—someone who seems to mean everything but ends up meaning nothing. And this is pre-Gitter.

The fantasy experiment was not successful. I didn't learn anything about pop music from listening to the most exemplary track of the 90's 55 times in a row that I couldn't have learned from watching some of Britney Spears' last music tour (the really creepy one with the clown MC). If you listen to the same song for two hours with someone, you will end up disliking parts of it and loving other aspects of it. You will think about all the homework you have to do that night. And the track will begin to fade into the background, no matter how much presence it holds in your environment. When you turn it off and switch to noise music, it will cease to exist for a little while. Maybe trying to learn everything about a song is fantastical in and of itself. Pop music exists because it's easy to like and hard to love. And so is Mariah Carey. *



73B
QUARANTINE 2



Obsessions and Duality: The Dark Corners of Christopher Nolan

by James Kang

I literally ran from one side of the city to the other to try and make a late show of *The Prestige* the day it opened. My fellow « New Wave » Eastern Yoo and I were rushing to try and make the start time and meet our friends. I felt bad already because they all wanted to see *Marie Antoinette*, but because we were so tardy, it had sold out.

The film finishes at around 1 in the morning. I'm sitting in my seat, I smell rank with sweat and the only thing I can think of is what I just saw for the last 2 and a half hours. Let me explain.

In sharing my story, I have to conclude that it was worth the run, the sweat and the anxiety of being late for the film. I really enjoy the films of Christopher Nolan— ever since I saw *Memento* many years ago I connected with his filmmaking. It continued with *Insomnia*, and then, finally, when I saw *Batman Begins* he was solidified as one of my favorite Hollywood directors.

So why would anyone enjoy Nolan? Why would I? I suppose it's because he has such a fascination with human obsession and duality. It appears in all of his films in one form or another. His fascination is warranted, because these concepts make for such interesting character studies.

Take, for instance, Bruce Wayne, who dedicates his life entirely to fighting crime. He is a billionaire playboy who has all the money and women in the world, but the only thing he can think about is dumping his time and money into a black rubber suit (not even made for extracurricular activities like pleasure seeking)... Pretty sad. You

have to ask yourself, « *Why?* ». Why would anyone do such a thing? Ultimately his obsession is destructive to him. The same thing happens to Leonard Shelby in *Memento*. His obsession with finding his wife's killer is the only thing that makes him happy. Without that he has no will to live. Our obsessions make us who we are sometimes, and even Nolan delves into ideas with an extreme degree of detail. It shows we are all consumed by our different interests: Some people love gossip, others popularity— Some their careers and others enjoy more physical pleasures like sexual intercourse or carbohydrates.

Nolan also deals with ideas of duality. Batman and Bruce Wayne are physically the same person, but psychologically they are totally different. The farce that Bruce Wayne plays is definitely a tragedy, for both he and others in his life. Leonard Shelby's story is just as tragic: He is struggling to cope with the Leonard from the past and the new Leonard, who is unable to create new memories. You see these themes recurring in *Following* and *Insomnia*, as well. There is so much to say about all of Nolan's films, which is a reason to go and take a look at his body of work.

Ultimately, though, Nolan's fascinations with obsession and duality are themes that become evident throughout the entire course of *The Prestige*. I don't want to talk too much about the film, simply because I think that people will enjoy it if they get a chance to experience it with fresh eyes. It is a film that provides much discussion.

I won't even get into the intelligence that went into the actual crafting of the film. After you see the film, think of the title, grab something to eat and then draw conclusions and connections: It'll blow your mind. *

The Legacy of Gillo Pontecorvo

by Marc Saint-Cyr

Like so many other certified cinematic masterpieces, *The Battle of Algiers* is a film with a remarkable reputation that precedes it. I had always meant to sit down and finally see this acclaimed political film, yet one thing or another had always prevented me from doing so. But recently, something happened which pushed me to finally watch it: Gillo Pontecorvo, the film's Italian director, passed away on October 14th at the age of 86. Pontecorvo (1919-2006) had experience in both documentaries and feature films, debuting in the latter category in 1957 with *The Wide Blue Road*. However, it was 1966's *The Battle of Algiers* that gained him international acclaim and would ably weather the test of time as one of the most significant and important political films ever made.

The film jumps straight into the action with the torture of an Algerian peasant at the hands of French soldiers, forcing the poor victim to disclose the location of Algerian resistance leader Ali La Pointe. As French troops try to talk the young rebel out of hiding, the camera focuses on his gaunt, determined face before the shot freezes and blurs out of focus, dissolving into a flashback that explores in detail the steady uprising of Algerians against their French occupiers. We see how the initial hit-and-run attacks gradually escalate into terrorist bombings that wipe out cafés, restaurants and airport terminals, killing several innocent civilians in the process. French paratroopers are eventually called in, essentially declaring an all-out war with the Front de Libération Nationale (FLN) in the streets of Algiers.

One of the qualities for which this film is remembered is its gritty, documentary-like style. Most of the shots are handheld, the camera often adjusts its focus, and the film stock has a grainy, newsreel quality. Also, in true neorealist fashion, most of the cast is made up of non-professional actors (with at least one exception in the French actor Jean Martin, who plays the paratrooper

leader Col. Mathieu). The overall effect is a natural, realistic quality that makes the film's scenes of violence, combat and bloodshed all the more disturbing.

With war still raging all over the world in the present day, *The Battle of Algiers* is more relevant than ever. It was more than a little chilling to watch such scenes as the one where three Algerian women carry out their individual missions to plant bombs in crowded civilian locations. Or the one where French soldiers torture Algerian citizens in a variety of gruesome methods in order to obtain information about the FLN's whereabouts. Or the film's final sequence set in December 1960, where the entire Algerian population, it seems, rises up against its French overlords in a city-wide standoff so huge, it's almost impossible to believe such a scene was staged. However, older versions of the film have been known to include a title card at the beginning declaring that it does not contain a single frame of documentary or newsreel footage. The result is a film which truly proves the power of cinema; a work of fiction which intimately resonates with the truth in its raw style and sociopolitical relevance.

Although Gillo Pontecorvo made 19 films in his lifetime (including documentaries and shorts), he will always be most remembered for *The Battle of Algiers*. In this even-sided portrayal of a dark and tragic time in history, he created a work of art which can be appreciated for its beauty, craftsmanship and message about human conflict. No matter how you do it, find yourself a copy of *The Battle of Algiers*, and savor (or re-savor) one of the most unique viewing experiences in cinema and, most importantly, remember Gillo Pontecorvo. • *Further reading for this article is available at www.mirror.co.uk.*

Helen Mirren in *The Queen*

by Justin Haley

The Queen is quite simply a masterpiece. It is a film of epic emotionality that delivers a humbling look at an institution we hold such pre-determined judgement for. It should not only be praised for its grandeur in performance from both Helen Mirren and Michael Sheen (who plays Tony Blair), but also for its marvelously timed humor and compassion.

The Queen tells the story of Queen Elizabeth II in a time when hatred for her runs deep and misunderstanding even deeper. The timeline of the film begins with Tony Blair's inauguration into the British monarch as their new Prime Minister. From this point on, *The Queen* examines a week in time that most people around the world

will recall—the death of Princess Diana. The death of the Princess sent the British people into extreme mourning and the press into a frenzy.

What the film aims to accomplish is a character study of those within Buckingham Palace and the struggles they endured during this period: The struggle between old and new and the changing ideologies over generations. At the core of the film is a conflict, one that can be defined as private versus public. The Queen wants a private funeral where her family can mourn in the peace of their own surroundings— while Tony Blair and Prince Charles push for the idea of a public funeral to please the British people. The film is brilliant and savvy in its representation of a struggle for privacy, understanding, and, in the end, respect.

Director Stephen Frears has made several wonderful films about conflicts in the British world (*My Beautiful Laundrette*, *Dirty Pretty Things*). *The Queen* may be his strongest work yet. He is sensitive, yet brave in his directing and exhibits a quiet confidence with his lens, which intriguingly lets the action unfold without any obnoxious force or bias.

The Queen commands our attention because of its dedication to portraying a woman we think we know, but really know absolutely little (emotionally) about. From simple hand gestures to the movement of her walk— Frears' dedication to the finer details of a woman is enthralling. Mirren is spellbinding in her portrayal of a woman who feels the power she once held shifting beneath her. She uses her eyes in numerous scenes to capture the subtle emotions of a

woman who shows the public very little. Her eyes are hunting and extraordinarily emotive. The power she holds in her face is of an undeniable acting capacity that many try, but few conquer.

Of course, Mirren will be nominated for an Oscar for this engrossing performance— and so she should. She is a commanding actress who illustrates a living woman with extreme honor.

Revealing truths is what Frears wants to achieve here— the truth of family, an institution, and a stubborn, yet compassionate woman. We see how the old tries to mix with the new and how the new tries to change the old. Is it possible?

